

PROVIDING EXPERIENCES WHICH WILL ENCOURAGE
CREATIVE WRITING IN THE PRIMARY GRADES

by

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INTRODUCTION

Many educators have come to realize that children have capacities for creative expression which need to be stimulated, encouraged, and guided in order to reach their fullest potential. This study arose from a need to learn how to provide the environment, the experiences, and the guidance that primary children need in order to be creative in written expression.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to review the literature in the field of creative writing at the primary grade level to discover how a teacher may effectively (1) provide a climate which is receptive to the free expression of ideas; (2) plan the creative experiences from which children derive motivation for creative writing; (3) direct creative writing without setting up restrictions which may hamper the free expression of children.

Importance of the Study

Research indicated that creative imagination during early childhood seems to reach a peak between four and four-and-one-half years and is followed by a drop at about the age of five when the child enters school for the first time. There is growth in creative thinking abilities from the first through the third grades and a sharp drop about the beginning of the fourth grade. This drop has generally been regarded as an inevitable developmental phenomenon in nature, but now there are indications that

this is a man-made or culture-made phenomenon rather than a natural one.¹

Torrance believes that the decrease in certain kinds of creative behavior as children grow older is due to an environment which does not encourage creativity. He reported that some workers have observed that the poetry, songs, and stories composed by young children are more creative than those of older children. "If creative products are not received with appreciation and respect," he said, "creative talents do not develop."²

Mauree Applegate, who has had wide experience in working with teachers and children in the field of creative writing, observed that the pre-school child who babbles forth with the most colorful and novel expressions does not often retain this spontaneity. She said:

The formal schoolroom gradually strips the blossoms of creative speech from the lips of children. Only the child with marked talent for the picturesque still retains his original language. Year after year the speech of each becomes a little more the speech of all, until during the adolescent period it takes on an actual pattern. The door of creativity shuts fast and for many, never opens again.³

Thus creative expression may be at its best in the child's pre-school years if his home environment allows him to explore, to ask questions, to imagine, and to talk freely about what he

¹E. Paul Torrance, "Adventuring in Creativity," Childhood Education, 40:82, October, 1963.

²E. Paul Torrance, Rewarding Creative Behavior (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), pp. 16-17.

³Mauree Applegate, Helping Children Write (Evanston, Illinois: Row, Peterson and Company, 1954), p. 11.

sees, feels, and hears. If he could maintain this creative peak during his early school experiences, perhaps he would not lose so much of his curiosity, his sense of wonder, his spontaneity and freedom of expression in the process of conforming to an adult world.¹

This raised some important questions: (1) What can primary grade teachers do to capture this free spirit of oral expression, keep it alive, and foster its growth? (2) How can they provide a classroom climate which is favorable to creativity? (3) How can they plan the experiences which will help preserve a young child's spontaneity and his eagerness to communicate?

Creative writing can be a very satisfying experience for children. It is a means of having fun and adventure in imaginative ways. When children write they often experience a release from inner tensions as well as a sense of satisfaction in doing something new and original. The feeling of pride and joy derived from sharing the results with others makes a child glow with a sense of accomplishment.²

Strickland pointed out that although most children will not add anything of lasting value to the literature of the world by their creative writing, they will add materially to their own mental and emotional well-being. She said, "It is not for the

¹Walter T. Petty and Mary Bowen, Slithery Snakes and Other Aids To Children's Writing (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967), pp. 2-3.

²Harry A. Greene and Walter T. Petty, Developing Language Skills in the Elementary Schools (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1964), pp. 381-382.

product that creative expression is important, but for the expansion of the child's own inner powers and the deepening of his sense of his personal worth and integrity."¹

This study was concerned with the value of creative expression to the individual child, the development of his mental and emotional well-being, and his sense of worth as an individual. It was prepared for the purpose of finding out how to develop the potential in every child by releasing the creativity within him that seeks expression through writing.²

Limitations of the Study

This study has been limited to creative writing in the primary grades.

Scope and Procedure

A major portion of this study was concerned with the review of literature in the area of the language arts which deals with creative writing on the primary grade level. It also included a review of some literature in the general area of creativity as it pertains to the experiences of the child in the primary grades. The references for this study were obtained largely from the Kansas State University Library.

¹Ruth G. Strickland, The Language Arts in the Elementary School (Boston: D. C. Heath Company, 1951), p. 238.

²Mauree Applegate, Helping Children Write (Evanston, Illinois: Row, Peterson and Company, 1954), p. 6.

Definition of Terms

Creative writing. Creative writing is written composition involving some degree of spontaneity and exercise of the imagination on the part of the writer. It usually implies that such writing is done voluntarily as a means of self expression.¹

Creative expression. Creative expression is any free expression of the child through such mediums as language, visual art, music, or rhythms, which is spontaneously evoked by the child's own feelings and experiences.²

PROVIDING A CLIMATE FOR CREATIVITY

In order to encourage a child's creative expression, it is important to provide a creative environment. This environment not only challenges interest, thought, and the desire to create, but also provides the atmosphere for emotional security that is necessary to keep the creative spirit alive.

Robertson stated that a good creative writing environment is no different from a wholesome learning environment which promotes positive understandings, attitudes, and behavior in any other area of the curriculum.³

¹Carter V. Good, Dictionary of Education (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1959), p. 610.

²Ibid., p. 144.

³Wanda Robertson, "Creating a Good Environment for Writing," Readings in the Language Arts in the Elementary School (Boston: D. C. Heath Company, 1964), p. 248.

Accepting the Child as an Individual

The child must feel that the teacher likes him, that she is interested in what he has to say, that he can trust her to understand and appreciate whatever he has to offer. The comradeship of the teacher and the appreciative response of his classmates may cause a timid or reserved child to blossom forth.¹

While many conditions contribute to a favorable environment for creative writing, it is doubtful whether any single factor is as important as warm and friendly relationships. Every child wants to achieve. He wants to be successful and important and be respected for his efforts. But in order to achieve, he needs the assurance that he is accepted for what he is as well as for what he writes.²

Beggs pointed out that each child's unique creative qualities need to be recognized. She warned that we are often blind to the inherent qualities a child possesses which show promise of creativity: originality, imagination, sense of wonder, curiosity, and keen observation.³

¹Mildred A. Dawson and Marian Zellinger, Guiding Language Learning (Yonkers-on-Hudson, New York: World Book Company, 1957), p. 440.

²Robertson, op. cit., pp. 253-254.

³Berenice B. Beggs, "How Do We Educate This Child For the Future? Don't Curb the Creative Appetite," School and Community, 52:14, 27, April, 1966.

Providing a Flexible Schedule

Petty and Brown suggested that a good teacher of creative writing will be flexible in the management of time, will take advantage of spontaneous situations as they arise, and will have " . . . the courage to blaze a trail in departing from the staid, too-routine and uninspiring, textbook-guided daily path . . . "¹

Forslund observed that any changes made in the curriculum seem to move in the direction of filling every available moment. Teachers feel that there is so much to learn that they must not waste a minute.² She expressed concern about the increasing rigidity of time apportionment and scheduling, and posed the following questions:

How can we hope to encourage creative involvement when the child is told each moment what he should be involved in and for just how long? Don't we need rather to think in terms of greater flexibility, perhaps of large blocks of learning time? Of course, this means taking a fresh look at the curriculum and the goals behind it. Are all these myriads of details we try to cover really essential? What is of greatest importance to the child in his world today?³

Thus if more and more emphasis is placed on the material to be covered, there will not be time or opportunity to encourage attitudes of creative thinking.⁴

¹Walter T. Petty and Mary E. Bowen, Slithery Snakes and Other Aids to Children's Writing (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967), p. 10.

²Janet E. Forslund, "An Inquiry Into the Nature of Creative Teaching," Journal of Education, 143:78, April, 1961.

³Ibid., p. 80.

⁴Ibid., p. 74.

Dawson believes that while children need the security which comes from a certain amount of regularly scheduled routine, they also welcome occasional deviations such as watching a flock of robins or enjoying the first snow of the season. Often these experiences may provide the stimulus for creative writing. Many opportunities for learning will be missed if the teacher maintains a rigid time schedule and fails to utilize every opportunity to make children aware of what is going on around them.¹

Physical Aspects of a Creative Classroom

An attractive and stimulating classroom was described by Greene and Petty as follows:

Little creative stimulation will come from a classroom that does not have many shelves of colorful and interesting books. Wall decorations and displays that are interesting and thought-provoking, materials for science and social studies in abundance, attractive furnishings, and other thoughtful and artistic touches are all important in making the classroom a stimulating place.²

Even if the school has limited financial means, a resourceful teacher can make any classroom a colorful and inviting place for learning. Free and inexpensive materials may be found in the fields, prairies, deserts, and woods of rural America. Even vacant lots and dumps of the city may yield interesting and useful

¹Mildred A. Dawson, Marian Zollinger, and Ardell Elwell, Guiding Language Learning (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1963), p. 353.

²Harry A. Greene and Walter T. Petty, Developing Language Skills in the Elementary Schools (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1964), p. 384.

items. Children are happy to supply an unlimited assortment of nature's "gifts" such as rocks, crayfish, cocoons, frog's eggs, sea shells, and the like. No matter what the monetary limitations may be, there are creative ways of bringing color and life into the classroom.¹

Importance of the Teacher in a Creative Environment

According to Mearns, the constant factor in a creative classroom is the teacher who understands the creative spirit of the child and recognizes when his creative work is the best that he is capable of doing. Mearns offered the following description of a creative teacher:

No superior outcome is possible in this field without the creative teacher. She it is whose subtle directing keeps the whole activity going. She shows her admiration for high achievement but honestly and without flattery. She will be patient with the slow worker but she will not give her approval to work that is shoddy. Quite often she will withhold assistance to a child in difficulty, who, she senses, is persisting rewardingly in the right direction. She is sure that being sensitive he will come through successfully. Her mature use of language, her taste, her confidence in the worth of her work, her genuine interest, all the elements, indeed, that make her an influencing personality--these are at work on the children all the time, although they may never be aware of it.²

The role that the teacher plays in guiding children to increase the potential power of their creative abilities was described by Hill as follows:

¹Prudence Bostwick, "Inventiveness With Time, Space, and Materials," Creativity in Teaching (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1961), p. 141.

²Hughes Mearns, Creative Power: The Education of Youth in the Creative Arts (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1958), p. 252.

. . . The role of the teacher is that of being aware of each child's ability, interest, activity. For in a classroom with creative permissiveness, the teacher has confidence and trust in each child's capability of creating. When and if the child needs a bit of help, he will turn to the teacher because this teacher has earned his trust and respect. . . . If we always feel in our hearts that the child can do better, while, at the same time, accepting what he does now, we are fulfilling the role of the teacher who fosters creativity.¹

The importance of the teacher in encouraging written expression was also emphasized in the following statement:

From most of the studies . . . one thread of meaning emerges. Children write vigorously and improve as authors when given the stimulus and support of an adult who cares about each child and his success in putting his ideas into written form.²

WAYS OF INSPIRING CREATIVE WRITING

Authorities in the field of the language arts emphasized the need for various types of experiences to stimulate children to express themselves in oral and written communication. For some children the enjoyment of books and stories creates a desire to produce their own stories. Other children are motivated by vivid sensory experiences such as the motion of the trees on a windy day or the crackle of leaves underfoot during an autumn walk.³

¹Jeraldine Hill, "Fostering Creativity," Elementary English, 37:25, January, 1960.

²Alvina T. Burrows, "Teaching Composition," What Research Says to the Teacher (Washington, D. C.: National Education Association, April, 1959), p. 3.

³Ruth G. Strickland, The Language Arts in the Elementary School (Boston: D. C. Heath Company, 1951), p. 240.

When children are stimulated by a stirring experience and are encouraged to express their reactions, they often feel the urge to write and share it with others. As they write they have feelings of release and a sense of achievement.¹

Providing Time For Thinking and Writing

In order that a child may think and write without distractions, Applegate suggested that a schoolroom may have a writer's corner behind a colorful screen where a child may be alone as he writes a story. On a panel of the screen there may be pictures, captions, and suggested titles to help stimulate the child who seems to lack original ideas for his stories.²

Giving children time for creative writing involves more planning than merely providing a period each day when all children may write. The opportunity to write need not always include the entire class. Individual children or small groups may be excused from other assignments.³ The following quotation explains why a flexible schedule is important:

Considerable time should be allowed to permit children to express themselves creatively. The desire to communicate ideas in an original way cannot be turned on and off as one does a faucet--one cannot expect the outflow of words to begin

¹Mildred A. Dawson, Marian Zollinger, and Ardeil Elwell, Guiding Language Learning (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1963), p. 356.

²Applegate, op. cit., p. 54.

³Walter T. Petty and Mary E. Bowen, Slithery Snakes and Other Aids to Children's Writing (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967), p. 14.

with the word 'on' and the product to be in completed form with the word 'off.' Children need the opportunity to write when they most strongly feel the urge to organize their thoughts and ideas.¹

In commenting on the element of time and its importance in a creative classroom, Hill said:

Regardless of how conducive to creativity the most democratic classroom is, if the schedule is so tight there is no time or opportunity when the child can create, then creativity is stifled, not fostered.²

Encouraging Oral Expression

A young child, in his pre-school years, often expresses himself in many original and creative ways. When he does not have an audience, he talks to himself. He has much to say if he can find a considerate listener, and he will begin to communicate if he finds a favorable environment.³

As he enters school he needs the experience of daily oral expression in an atmosphere where he knows that his thoughts and feelings will be welcomed.⁴ Conversation is the most frequent

¹Harold G. Shane and others, Improving Language Arts Instruction in the Elementary School (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1962), p. 413.

²Jeraldine Hill, "Fostering Creativity," Elementary English, 37:25, January, 1960.

³James A. Fitzgerald and Patricia G. Fitzgerald, Teaching Reading and the Language Arts (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1965), p. 260.

⁴Alvina Treut Burrows, Doris C. Jackson, and Dorothy O. Saunders, They All Want To Write (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1964), p. 27.

form of oral expression and it is in conversational activities that children speak with greatest fluency.¹

Oral language experiences are basic to the expression of one's thoughts in writing. Some authorities believe that in the primary grades abundant experience in oral expression is more important in the development of the ability to write than the actual writing itself.² Every piece of writing produced by a child in the primary grades is a reflection of the type of oral work that has been done in that grade.³

The "Show and Tell" activity is helpful for a timid child. As he shows his new sweater, a sea shell, or a book, he has something on which to direct his attention and may thus keep from thinking about himself and any hesitancy he may feel in talking.⁴

The experience of telling stories provides opportunities for a very enjoyable and satisfying endeavor. Special attention should be given to the creation of a classroom atmosphere where the children feel relaxed and at ease. A child may choose to relate a personal experience or tell a story he has heard or read. Sometimes the telling may involve the creation of a new story.⁵

¹Mildred A. Dawson and Marian Zollinger, Guiding Language Learning (New York: World Book Company, 1957), p. 440.

²Burrows, Jackson, and Saunders, loc. cit.

³Ruth G. Strickland, "Evaluating Children's Composition," Elementary English, 37:324, May, 1960.

⁴Harry A. Greene and Walter T. Petty, Developing Language Skills in the Elementary Schools (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1964), p. 210.

⁵Ibid., p. 97.

After being warmly received by an attentive audience, one child declared, "I just love to tell stories. It feels so good when you finish."¹

Children enjoy various forms of story telling. They enjoy telling chain stories in which the teacher or one of the pupils starts a story and after a time stops and asks another pupil to continue. This process continues, perhaps to every child in the room. A simpler version is the unfinished story which is completed by a single pupil. Sometimes changing the endings of stories in books will also bring out considerable creativity of expression.²

Stories which have a simple plot and which have become well known to children are excellent for informal dramatization. Children should be encouraged to speak the character parts spontaneously and creatively in their own words.³

Puppets also furnish opportunities for creative expression. Children may use their own ideas in constructing them and then use them to retell stories or to present original stories.⁴ Some shy

¹Lucy Campbell Dewey and others, The Challenge. A Guide for Teachers of Gifted Children, K-3 (Castro Valley, California: Alameda County School Department, 1963), p. 73.

²Greene and Petty, op. cit., p. 393.

³Harold G. Shane and others, Improving Language Arts Instruction in the Elementary School (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Books, Inc., 1962), pp. 145-146.

⁴Dewey and others, op. cit., p. 74.

children find it easier to expose themselves through a puppet actor.¹

One teacher devised a cardboard carton stage in such a way that a child could move his hand under the stage. The children cut out figures and mounted them on cardboard with a folded section at the bottom so that the characters would stand. After putting a paper clip on the folded section, they used a magnet under the stage to move the characters as the story was told.²

Providing Experiences With Literature

Creative writing may be stimulated by the enjoyment of literature which the teacher shares by reading or telling and which the children may read for their own enjoyment. Wilt emphasized the importance of experiences with literature as she wrote, "The foundation stone of all writing is to see, hear, and read massive amounts of good writing in all its variety and forms. Nothing can be substituted for this."³

According to Applegate, children who grow up with books and stories can more easily write their own. She said:

Read aloud to your children. Choose books a level or two above what children can read for themselves. Don't make the mistake of talking about the book. Great stories need no artificial respiration to make them alive to others. They need merely to be read; first together, later alone.

¹ Paul S. Anderson, Language Skills in Elementary Education (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964), p. 67.

² Dewey and others, loc. cit.

³ Miriam Wilt, "Writing and Learning," Childhood Education, 42:152, November, 1965.

From reading to writing is a natural step. Reading and writing have always lived next door to each other, but few people have found the hole in the hedge between them. It is through wide reading that one learns to write; and it is through writing that one learns the fine points of reading.¹

Miriam Mason, well known author of children's books, grew up in rather meager circumstances, lacking the modern diversions of radio, television, and the movies. But she was surrounded with good books which, she recalled, ". . . were the dear friends, the teachers, and the greatest influence of my childhood."²

Through movies, radio, comics, and television, children are exposed to much that is commonplace and artificial. Therefore, it is of prime importance to provide them with satisfying experiences with good literature. No conscious comparison should be made with the children's own efforts.³ However, "children who have had frequent exposures to literature and good writing will develop taste for the best, and high standards of quality in their own work will result."⁴

¹Mauree Applegate, Helping Children Write (Evanston, Illinois: Row, Peterson and Company, 1954), p. 6.

²Paul C. Burns and Ruth Hines, "Miriam E. Mason: Story-telling Sister," Elementary English, 43:5, January, 1966.

³Alvina Treut Burrows, Doris C. Jackson, and Dorothy O. Saunders, They All Want To Write (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964), p. 112.

⁴Zeta O. Doyle, "Literature and Creative Writing," California Journal of Elementary Education, 29:183, February, 1961.

Stimulating Sensory Awareness

The teacher may provide learning experiences which will increase children's sensitivity to the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures of their immediate environment. According to educators of San Bernadino County, California, providing vivid sensory experiences is a means of encouraging creative written expression. They described opportunities for sensory stimulation as follows:

Many sensory experiences stimulate the urge to write. All children should know how it feels to have the wind blow through their hair, to ride fast down a hill on a bicycle, to have a kitten's rough tongue lick their hands. They should see how the trees bend with the wind, how tumbleweeds roll. They should listen to the pattering of rain against the window pane, the thundering roll of trucks on the highway; They should smell the spicy fragrance of baking cookies, the pungent odor of newly up-turned earth, the salty tang of the sea. These experiences stir the emotions and the urge to express them.¹

Applegate suggested taking the class on a tour of the senses. On a spring or fall morning take a smelling tour out-of-doors and come back to the classroom and try to change the smells into words. Sight tours and sound tours may be carried out in the same way, and may be followed by group vocabulary work.²

Another way to stimulate sensory awareness is to ask each child to spend fifteen minutes by himself during the week under a

¹ Ruth Drewes, Winifred Fischer, and Lorna Round, Practical Plans for Teaching English in Elementary Schools (Dubuque, Iowa: William C. Brown Company, 1965), p. 250.

² Mauree Applegate, Helping Children Write (Evanston, Illinois: Row, Peterson Company, 1954), pp. 36-39.

bush or tree quietly watching what is going on around him. Then let the children share their thoughts, feelings, or sensory impressions. For some children this experience may be the inspiration for some form of creative writing.¹

Children should be given opportunities to enjoy the sensory impressions which they find in their stories and songs. Materials brought for a "five senses" center may cause them to become more sensitive to variations in colors, textures, sounds, tastes, and odors.² These experiences may also help the children to enter imaginatively into the feelings of other living things. One child in summing up his response to the unit said, "I'm more careful now when I pick up my rabbit; I try to make my hands feel soft to him."³

Teachers in Castro Valley, California prepared a guide with suggested enrichment activities for gifted children in the primary grades. In the unit entitled "Ways to Know My World," children participate in activities which will increase awareness of their environment through sensory experiences. They discuss their observations and reactions. Then they develop lists of descriptive words or phrases for sounds, smells, tastes, or

¹ Ibid., p. 40.

² Prudence Bostwick, "Inventiveness With Time, Space, and Materials," Creativity in Teaching (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1961), p. 146.

³ Ibid., p. 148.

textures.¹ The value of this vocabulary enrichment comes from learning to search for the word or phrase which says exactly what one sees or feels, and not from using the list and trying to fit these descriptive terms into one's own writing. After noting colorful phrases and writing them on the blackboard, they are erased so the children will not feel obliged to use them in a story or poem.²

Torrance cited an experiment in which various sensory impressions were used to stimulate children's creative writing. He described the procedure as follows:

One experiment shows that children can increase the clarity and vividness of their perceptions of sensory stimuli and that this affects the quality of their creative writing. Over a ten week period, one group practiced writing vivid descriptions of pictures which they had studied; the second studied literary models containing words of sound, color, and movement; the third practiced describing all of the possible sensations, such as sight, smell, touch, and hearing, that they could experience in examining an object or situation. The third group showed significantly greater gains on composition tests than did the other two groups.³

¹Dewey and others, The Challenge. A Guide for Teachers of Gifted Children, K-3 (Castro Valley, California: Alameda County School Department, 1963), pp. 11-43.

²Alvina Treut Burrows, Doris C. Jackson, and Dorothy O. Saunders, They All Want To Write (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964), p. 112.

³Paul Torrance, "Creativity," What Research Says to the Teacher (Washington, D. C.: National Education Association, April, 1963), p. 18.

Utilizing Personal Experiences

Some of the best stories that children write are about their own experiences. Many children who do not have much imagination can tell an exciting story of a real happening.¹ A teacher can help children realize that the everyday happenings of their lives are important and interesting to others. Mearns made a practice of telling stories out of his own everyday life in order to show his pupils that one can find something moving and exciting in seemingly trivial events.²

The personal benefits that the child gains from writing about his ideas, feelings, and experiences were emphasized by Lois Lenski as follows:

This type of writing develops each child as an individual. A retiring, timid child can be brought out because he has observed things the others have passed by. A tense, nervous child may put into words those things that are worrying him, and so find release from his tensions. This type of writing brings out all the child's originality and freshness of point of view. It helps him to observe more carefully. It intensifies his mental images, and it gives him the joy of self-expression.³

Children are often writing about themselves even when they write fanciful tales. They may be unconsciously revealing their

¹Mauree Applegate, Helping Children Write (Evanston, Illinois: Row, Peterson Company, 1954), p. 81.

²Hughes Mearns, Creative Power: The Education of Youth in the Creative Arts (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1958), pp. 254-255.

³Lois Lenski, "Helping Children Create," Childhood Education, 26:102, November, 1949.

own thoughts and feelings in the words and actions of their imaginary characters.¹

Enriching Experiences Through Excursions

According to Shane and others, "If children are to acquire a rapidly growing and functional store of language meanings, they need a rich diet of experiences rather than the thin gruel of rote learning."² Their experiences may be extended and enriched by class trips out into the environment. These excursions, shared by the group, have the advantage over individual experiences in that they offer a common basis for conversation and discussion. The pre-planning session in the classroom and the guidance of the teacher and other adults during the trip help to direct the children's observations, to explain processes, and to guide conversation.³

The language experience which follows the excursion may be a sharing of ideas and observations by means of oral or written communication. Applegate suggested that encouraging the child to write about only one adventure and leave out the rest of the trip,

¹Alvina Treut Burrows, Doris C. Jackson, and Dorothy O. Saunders, They All Want To Write (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964), p. 112.

²Harold G. Shane and others, Improving Language Arts Instruction in the Elementary School (Columbus, Ohio: Charles R. Merrill Books, Inc., 1962), p. 65.

³Althea Berry, "Experience-the Source of Communication," Readings in the Language Arts in the Elementary School (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1964), pp. 17-18.

may help to get the story told. These stories may be placed in a "Trip Box" and shared with the class.¹

An excursion need not always involve a train ride or a bus trip to a distant place. Valuable experience may be gained from observing activities in other parts of the school building or in the immediate neighborhood. Stimulation of the desire to write may come from a short walk to examine animal tracks in the snow² or from the observation of animals and birds who are "acting out stories all along the street."³

Bostwick observed that it is often in the use of nearby humble things that a teacher can encourage in his students the power of observation and appreciation and develop skills in expressing their reactions and feelings.⁴

Helping Children Value Their Ideas

Children need to feel that their ideas have value. They need to feel comfortable and at ease knowing that they can express their inner thoughts and feelings and receive a sympathetic response.⁵ Otherwise they will be more likely to stay with what is

¹Mauree Applegate, Helping Children Write (Evanston, Illinois: Row, Peterson and Company, 1954), p. 63.

²Ibid., p. 70.

³Ibid., p. 55.

⁴Prudence Bostwick, "Inventiveness With Time, Space, and Materials," Creativity in Teaching (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1961), pp. 163, 168.

⁵Sidney W. Tiedt, "Self Involvement in Writing," Elementary English, 44:476, May, 1967.

safe, the conventional and the certain, rather than pushing ahead with imaginative speculation.¹

Forslund suggested that a teacher must train herself to recognize new thoughts and ideas which are manifestations of real creativity. She wrote:

A child should be commended for the idea or expression which is truly his own. Even if it is only a phrase or a partial idea, it has merit if it is the expression of his true self, not something imposed from without.²

Torrance described the use of an "idea trap" for helping children value their own ideas and those of their classmates. Each time a pupil thought of a new, interesting, or unusual idea, he was asked to "trap" it before it was lost, by jotting it down on a notepad. Then when time permitted he could write it out in detail in the form of a story, poem, song, play, joke, game, or in whatever way he liked. He then put it in a large brown envelope which each child kept in his desk.

On Friday each child was asked to choose from the envelope the idea that others might enjoy most. A magazine containing these ideas was published each week and distributed to everyone in the room. Children were urged not to throw away any of their ideas since they may like them better when they read them again in two or three weeks.

¹Elliot W. Eisner, Think With Me About Creativity (Dansville, New York: F. A. Owen Publishing Company, 1964), p. 46.

²Janet E. Forslund, "An Inquiry into the Nature of Creative Teaching," Journal of Education, 143:80, April, 1961.

This procedure was tested with a group of one hundred children in the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grades for a period of six weeks. During this time teachers were asked to go ahead with regularly scheduled activities and not give any "extra" instruction in creative writing.

The results showed that third-graders were highest in productivity and showed significant growth in creative writing as measured by pre- and post-training stories. Most of the children learned to value their own ideas more highly as well as those of their classmates. Regression was shown by the fifth grade and was attributed to their resentment of a small amount of editing done before their writing appeared in the magazine. They felt that this was a disavowal of the value of their ideas.¹

Arousing Creative Imagination

In order to spark creative writing a variety of stimuli may be used because different children respond in different ways. For some, the use of objects and pictures may be the avenue to awaken creative impulses. Some find it easier to get started if a descriptive title or story beginning is provided.

Use of pictures. Although first hand experiences provide the best materials for developing self expression, pictures which "tell stories" may also be used to stimulate creativity. Animals,

¹E. Paul Torrance, Rewarding Creative Behavior (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 237-249.

play experiences, and familiar scenes are the most appropriate to use with younger children.¹ While book jackets and magazine and newspaper pictures are excellent to use for this purpose, one should not overlook the possibilities of drawings made by the children.²

Telling stories from pictures is a means of helping children to think in sequence. This experience of telling successive events in a logical series aids a child in his own story writing endeavors.³ After children have had training in studying pictures together, it is better to have the stories written without discussion. If the picture suggests an experience similar to one the child has had, his story will usually be a better one.⁴

In using paintings to motivate creative writing, Labrecque suggested having children write their spontaneous reactions and impressions at first sight with no preliminary discussion. Then after discussing specifics of the painting and learning about the artist, the children may write another story or a revised version of their original stories. She named John Steuart Curry's

¹Harold G. Shane, Mary E. Reddin, Margaret C. Gillespie, Beginning Language Arts With Children (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1961), p. 226.

²Walter T. Petty and Mary E. Bowen, Slithery Snakes and Other Aids to Children's Writing (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967), pp. 34-36.

³Margaret Bierbaum and Dave Sohn, "Did the Cat Eat the Mouse? Or", The Grade Teacher, 84:91, November, 1966.

⁴Mauree Applegate, Helping Children Write (Evanston, Illinois: Row, Peterson and Company, 1954), pp. 60-61.

painting, Tornado Over Kansas, as one that will stir pupils' curiosity and imagination and set them to writing quickly.¹

May and Tabachnick warned that one should be very careful in the choice of pictures to stimulate creative writing. It is best to use pictures that leave something of the story for children's imaginations to supply. A non-objective or abstract drawing may intrigue some children who are not interested in the more explicit pictures.²

Use of interesting objects. One teacher used a bag of old shoes to stimulate creative writing. The assortment included a football shoe, a tennis shoe, a satin pump, etc. The class was motivated by questions such as, "Who wore this shoe?" "Where has it been?" Why was it thrown away?"³

The caption, "I Have a Story to Tell," may spark the desire to write about an interesting object. When the children are studying pioneer life, an old shawl, a spinning wheel, or an antique vase may be used to motivate story writing.⁴

The children may bring paper sacks containing five unrelated objects. These may be kept in a closet and given to

¹Candita Labrecque, "Art in the Classroom--Pictures Motivate Creative Writing," The Grade Teacher, 85:91-92, February, 1968.

²Frank B. May and B. Robert Tabachnick, "Three Stimuli for Creative Writing," The Elementary School Journal, 67:89-93, November, 1966.

³Paul S. Anderson, Language Skills in Elementary Education, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964), p. 338.

⁴Applegate, op. cit., p. 59.

individual children in their free time with the suggestion that they write stories incorporating all five objects. Individuality of children will be evident in the varied writing about the same five objects.¹

A table may be prepared with a variety of objects, such as a red neckerchief, a key, a piece of fur, several coins, three or four dolls, etc. The entire collection is covered with a cloth. When the cloth is removed, the children may discuss the articles, handle them, and take them back to their desks to examine if they wish. Each child may write a story about the object he chooses.²

"Story starter" techniques. The following suggestions may be used as springboards to get writing started:

1. Specific Topics

If I Had \$1,000 to Spend
 A Space Man Comes to Visit
 What an Ant Might Think About
 The Earliest Thing I Remember in My Life
 The Story of a Dime
 The Fairy Godmother Who Lost Her Wand
 Sounds I Hear at the Beginning or Ending of the Day
 The Nicest Person I Know
 If I Were Living Long Ago³

¹James A. Smith, Creative Teaching of the Language Arts in the Elementary School (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1967), pp. 185-186.

²Alice Meeker, Teachers at Work (New York: Bobbs Merrill Company, 1963), pp. 50-51.

³Walter T. Petty and Mary E. Bowen, Slithery Snakes and Other Aids to Children's Writing (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967), pp. 18-19.

2. Invented Circumstances

Pretend you are an inanimate object (a parking meter, a little boy's socks, etc.). Make a list of your complaints.¹

You are lying on the bank of a stream watching your fishing line. Suddenly you hear a rustle in the leaves behind you. You jump up. Tell what happens next.²

Write about places you could go if you were two inches tall and had wings.³

Write about what you would do if you were a frog stuck fast in the mud.⁴

If you were a zoo keeper, what would you do if this happened? One morning you come to the zoo and find your helper inside the monkey's cage. The monkey is outside sweeping the walk!⁵

Write what happens to an old automobile tire, a lost golfball, an unaddressed letter, etc.⁶

3. Nonsense Titles

All About Grandfather's Glim
The Squigdee and the Wingbat
Three Miles From Nillypoo
Why the Wiggydose Will Never Forget Dillybump
An Adventure in Pollygoop⁷

¹Walter T. Petty and Mary E. Bowen, Slithery Snakes and Other Aids to Children's Writing (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967), p. 22.

²Ibid., p. 23.

³Mauree Applegate, Easy In English (Evanston, Illinois: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 353.

⁴Marlene Glaus, From Thoughts to Words (Champaign, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1965), p. 75.

⁵R. E. Myers and E. Paul Torrance, Can You Imagine? (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1965), p. 18.

⁶Smith, op. cit., p. 193.

⁷Petty and Bowen, op. cit., p. 23.

4. Beginning Sentences and Phrases

I was an acorn lying in the tall grass.
 A clown is the nicest man to know.
 I wish I could . . .
 It was the middle of the night and everyone in the
 house was asleep.¹

The above-named suggestions may be especially helpful to spark creative writing for the unimaginative child. Applegate believes that although "true creativeness comes from within," children may use ideas that have come from outside themselves and weave them into a product that is essentially their own.²

Mearns, on the other hand, added a word of caution in the following statement:

. . . one must beware of regarding as important only those themes that adults believe in for children. . . . even certain types of imaginative stories, and, in fact, much of children's outward show of interests, have possibly been put upon them. Social expectation is a terrific force. As yet we do not really know what comes up naturally and unbidden from the deep sources of the creative life and what is summoned to appear by the overpowering convention of 'what every nice child should be thinking about.'³

¹Petty and Bowen, op. cit., pp. 24-25.

²Mauree Applegate, Helping Children Write (Evanston, Illinois: Row, Peterson and Company, 1954), p. 41.

³Hughes Mearns, Creative Power: The Education of Youth in the Creative Arts (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1958), p. 30.

WAYS OF GIVING HELP DURING THE WRITING PROCESS

Dictation

Since primary grade children are handicapped by the lack of skill in the mechanics of writing, dictation is the essential first step in written expression. The children tell their stories to the teacher and she writes for them. Individual children may begin to do their own writing as soon as they are able to do so. However, even after the stage of self writing has begun, a child should have occasional opportunities to dictate when this meets his needs. If he is fatigued he may be inclined to taper off the end of the story with a weak ending. However, if the teacher will serve as a scribe and write the last few lines for him, the story may be completed to his satisfaction.¹

Group dictation. Working together to compose a group story may provide a number of children the satisfaction of seeing their ideas in writing as the teacher records their contributions. Greene and Petty, believing that in group writing some attention should be paid to the mechanical skills, made the following suggestion:

As the teacher uses a capital letter, he may say, 'I'm making a capital letter to begin my sentence.' . . . The same approach may be used with periods and other punctuation

¹Ruth G. Strickland, The Language Arts in the Elementary School (Boston: D. C. Heath Company, 1951), pp. 228-231.

and with margins, position of title, and, with less direct attention, to the spelling of words.¹

Individual dictation. Burrows suggested the following procedure for individual dictation: The class should be engaged in some quiet activity needing a minimum of supervision. Then individual volunteers may quietly dictate their stories to the teacher. When a child is dictating, the teacher should avoid making corrections. Even at the end of the dictating, it is not advisable to make elaborate corrections in phrasing and wording. She noted that:

In the primary grades, our limited research suggests that it is more desirable to cherish fluency and uniqueness of expression than complete correctness by adult standards.²

Transition to Independent Writing

The time to make the transition from dictation to the child's actual writing of his own stories can be determined only by his individual growth. Some children may still need spelling help when writing their first stories alone. The following technique was used by a third grade teacher: Four children who were writing stories were seated at a large table. As they asked for help in spelling, the teacher wrote each word quickly on a

¹Harry A. Greene and Walter T. Petty, Developing Language Skills in the Elementary Schools (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1964), p. 227.

²Alvina T. Burrows, "Teaching Composition," What Research Says To the Teacher (Washington, D. C.: National Education Association, April, 1959), p. 11.

piece of paper. By giving help immediately, continuity of thinking was maintained and the children had the satisfaction of getting their stories quickly into permanent form.¹

If the child is writing when the teacher is not able to give immediate help, Burns and Lowe suggested that he may use some of the following procedures:

1. Leave a space for the unknown word and continue with writing.
2. Write as much of the beginning of the word as he can.
3. Write the probable spelling on an extra slip of paper. If it looks correct, use it.
4. Think through the story before beginning to write and ask the teacher to list difficult words on the board.
5. Keep a piece of paper on his desk, so that the teacher may quickly write down any word he requests.
6. Look up the word in the spelling word box, picture dictionary, or in a reader where he knows the word may be found.
7. Keep a spelling notebook with a separate page devoted to words that he likes to use frequently.²

Emphasis on Ideas--Not the Mechanics of Writing

Lois Lenski warned that the process of guiding creative expression should never be confused with the teaching of the techniques of writing. These are two distinct procedures. She said:

¹Alvina Treut Burrows, Doris C. Jackson, and Dorothy O. Saunders, They All Want To Write (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964), pp. 41-42.

²Paul C. Burns and Alberta L. Lowe, The Language Arts in Childhood Education (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966), pp. 148-149.

It should always be remembered that creation is a flowing of ideas. Given a stimulus, ideas come pouring from the mind like water from a fountain. It is all too easy to stop this creative flow. Rules for punctuation, spelling, grammar, and handwriting will stop it. Emphasis on rules is sure to stifle creative thinking.¹

If children are to receive as much satisfaction from creative writing as they receive from other forms of creative art, their writing must be accepted in the same manner as their creative expression in drawings and paintings. In making a plea for withholding criticism of children's creative writing, Fisher suggested, "Instead of red marks, why not make comments in green, designed to encourage children to go forward?" Continuing, he said:

As with painting, we are not so much interested in the finished product as we are in the process. . . . The process rather than the product is the main concern in creative writing in the elementary school.²

Children's creative expression is often personal and unique and should be accepted with genuine respect and appreciation. Mearns emphasized that a teacher must discern genuine creative expression as opposed to that which is commonplace and then cultivate a liking for it in the child who brought it forth. He suggested that the teacher may say to the child, "That's it!

¹Lois Lenski, "Helping Children to Create," Childhood Education, 26:104, November, 1949.

²Robert J. Fisher, "Put Aside That Red Pencil!" Education, 86:209-210, December, 1965.

Just no one ever said this before, or in this way. That really is you speaking."¹

SHARING CREATIVE WRITING

Opportunities for young writers to share their productions should be provided whenever they wish to do so. In the early stages the teacher may read the stories to the class. Children's first attempts at writing may be meager and disjointed, and young children may lack the skills to read their stories effectively. Then the teacher may be able to bring the fullest enjoyment of the story to the audience, and through dramatic reading, emphasize the good points and cover up the insufficiencies.²

When children reach the third grade, many of them are able to take over the reading of their own stories. To prepare for a successful presentation, they may be encouraged to practice reading the story to themselves. This may help them discover where words have been omitted or where the meaning is not clear so that they may make the necessary changes.³

Burrows, Jackson, and Saunders emphasized that since nothing stifles creative effort so quickly as adverse criticism, only appreciative comments are made during the sharing time.

¹Hughes Mearns, Creative Power: The Education of Youth in the Creative Arts (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1958), p. 31.

²Alvina Treut Burrows, Doris C. Jackson, and Dorothy O. Saunders, They All Want To Write (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964), p. 96.

³Ibid.

They warned, "The exclusion of negative criticism is an absolute must for any successful program of creative writing."¹

Some children are eager to have all of their stories read to the class. Others are hesitant about sharing, although they may show their writings to a teacher who is receptive and understanding.² A box or a drawer marked "Private" may be available for the works of the children who desire that no one but the teacher see them.³

Books may be assembled with the children's writings and their own illustrations. These are read and re-read in the classroom with understanding and appreciation.⁴

Some children enjoy posting their works with others in a Writer's Corner in the classroom, or having them printed in the school newspaper.⁵ Writing which is being preserved and shared in this manner should be corrected and recopied in final form for others to read.⁶ However, when children's stories are shared with others in permanent written form, teachers must take care, lest

¹Ibid., p. 82.

²Ruth G. Strickland, Improving Language Arts in the Elementary School (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1964), p. 38.

³Hughes Mearns, Creative Power: The Education of Youth in the Creative Arts (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1958), pp. 21-22.

⁴Eleanor Buelka, "The Drama of Teaching Reading Through Creative Writing," The Reading Teacher, 19:272, January, 1966.

⁵Walter T. Petty and Mary Bowen, Slithery Snakes and Other Aids to Children's Writing (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967), p. 15.

⁶Burrows, Jackson, and Saunders, op. cit., p. 222.

they become more concerned about the end-product of writing than what the writing has done to and for the child.¹ If the child is gaining in confidence and power and in appreciation for the worth of his ideas, his work is good regardless of the quality of the story he tells.²

SUMMARY

Research indicated that children are generally more creative in their expression at the pre-school and primary grade level than they are in the later years of their elementary school experience. As they grow older they tend to conform to conventional ways of thinking, speaking, and acting. Therefore, it is essential to preserve and nurture the child's natural spontaneity and freedom of expression in the primary grades--the time when he is being exposed to the socialization and authority of formal education.

Children will be more creative in an environment where there is a relaxed atmosphere, a warm and friendly relationship, due respect for another's ideas, and ample provision of time for creative expression.

Authorities emphasized the need for various types of experiences to stimulate children to express themselves in creative

¹Mauree Applegate, Helping Children Write (Evanston, Illinois: Row, Peterson and Company, 1954), p. 172.

²Ruth Drewes, Winifred Fischer, and Lorna Round, Practical Plans for Teaching English in Elementary Schools (Dubuque, Iowa: William C. Brown Company, 1965), p. 248.

writing. Oral expression of ideas and the enjoyment of literature, which the teacher shares by reading or telling and which the children may read for their own enjoyment, help to lay the foundation for later experience in writing.

Sensory learning experiences increase the child's sensitivity to the sights, sounds, smells, and textures of his immediate environment and help him to make his stories come alive with vivid expression.

In writing about themselves and their own experiences, children often experience release from tensions, as well as the joy of sharing events that are important in their own lives. The teacher may enrich the child's experiences by planning excursions and nature walks, and by bringing materials into the classroom to make it a stimulating and inviting place for learning.

Some children may be motivated by pictures, interesting objects, and "story starter" ideas. Authorities indicated that these techniques may be especially helpful for the unimaginative child, but it is well to make certain that no child feels bound to accept these ideas instead of using his own. Ideally, the child's best creative expression springs from within, not from ideas and suggestions imposed from without.

Since primary grade children are handicapped by the lack of skill in the mechanics of writing, dictation is the essential first step in written expression. As the children tell their stories, the teacher writes for them. Since fluency and uniqueness of expression are more important than complete correctness,

it is not advisable to make elaborate changes in the child's manner of telling the story.

When the child is ready to write independently, emphasis should be placed on the recording of ideas rather than on the mechanics of writing. However, authorities recommended that children's writings should be corrected and recopied if they are to be assembled in some form for others to read. Care should be taken to retain the child's ideas and his style of writing.

If children desire to share their stories with the class, they should be given the opportunity to do so. Only appreciative comments are made during the sharing time.

In the primary grades, it is not the end-product of creative writing which is important. Rather, the value is to be found in the process of writing as the child gains in his power of creative expression and in his sense of worth as an individual.

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PROVIDING EXPERIENCES WHICH WILL ENCOURAGE
CREATIVE WRITING IN THE PRIMARY GRADES

by

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of Emporia, 1949

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The purpose of this study was to discover how a teacher in the primary grades may effectively (1) provide a climate which is receptive to the free expression of ideas, (2) plan the creative experiences from which children derive motivation for creative writing, and (3) direct creative writing without setting up restrictions which may hamper the free expression of children.

Research included a review of literature in the area of the language arts which deals with creative writing on the primary grade level. It also included a review of some literature in the general area of creativity as it pertains to the experiences of the child in the primary grades.

Studies indicated that children are generally more creative in their expression at the pre-school and primary grade level than they are in the later years of their elementary school experience. As they grow older they tend to conform to conventional ways of thinking, speaking, and acting. Therefore, it is essential to preserve and nurture the child's natural spontaneity and freedom of expression in the primary grades--the time when he is being exposed to the socialization and authority of formal education.

The review of the literature revealed an almost inexhaustible source of ideas for initiating and guiding creative writing, for improving the quality of children's writing, and for giving the child supreme satisfaction in his creative writing endeavors. Throughout the literature two other points of emphasis seemed to recur: (1) ideally, the child's best creative expression springs from within, not from ideas and suggestions imposed from without;

(2) the values which the child receives through creative writing are more important than the writing product itself.

In a school environment which encourages creativity, there is a relaxed atmosphere, a warm and friendly relationship, due respect for another's ideas, and ample provision of time for creative expression.

Teachers who guide the experiences of young children who have not yet begun to express themselves in written form, may lay the foundation for creative writing by (1) providing many opportunities for oral expression, (2) enriching children's personal experiences, (3) providing experiences with literature, (4) developing sensory awareness, and (5) arousing creative imagination by means of pictures, objects, and other "story starter" techniques.

The first creative written expression may be done by groups, or individually, with the teacher doing the actual writing as the children dictate the stories to her. When the child is ready to write independently, emphasis should be placed on the recording of ideas and not on the mechanics of writing. However, when a child's story is preserved in some permanent form for others to read, it may be corrected and recopied. Care should be taken to retain the child's ideas and his style and flavor of writing.

When opportunities are provided for sharing creative writing, some children are eager to do so, while others are timid and hesitant. In the matter of sharing, the wishes of the child author should be respected. Only appreciative comments should be made during the sharing time.